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THE HOLY WELL

AND OTHER POEMS

WILLIAM MOORE





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THE HOLY WELL AND OTHER POEMS

THE HOLY WELL

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

WILLIAM MOORE, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "EYES IN SOLITUDE," ETC.

LONDON EGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRI

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THE HOLY WELL

- Are they coming soon? Athwart the lichened arch the beetle drones;
- All gentle inarticulate things are vocal in this cool.
- Hark! creeping through the moss that wraps the weather-stained stones
- The breeze itself is murmuring something o'er the holy pool.
- Are they coming? On the Well's high brink, a spike against the sky
- That crowns the hills and vale where Isis shows the lilied fords,
- An agrimony's richly-jewelled finger seems to lie
- On that far golden harp of eve and all its crimson chords.
- Those crimson chords are quivering now as if they could not wait;
- Too long just for a human voice their prelude is delayed.

•

- Ah! if indeed into sound a hand such colour did translate,
- How sweet, how rich, how diverse deep would be the music made!
- And the cascade by the willows creeping through the wooden sluices
- Ever lends its falling music which through the night will fall:
- Sweet, each with other blended, are all its many voices;
- Yet one tender human voice would be sweeter than them all.
- The sunset bars were red as yonder long ago;
- And the beetle droned as now he drones, by the cavern of the well,
- And Isis with his smooth gleam flashed where the pollards bend below;
- And slumberous tones of his many weirs came on the breeze's swell.
- Up from the boat that plied them o'er, up from the stream they came;
- Their voice was heard among them; articulate their word;

- They sang of the wells of Baca, the loved and changeless name;
- They sang of their appearing in their Zion to the Lord.
- And then they halted by this living font, a joyous band;
- Priest, hooded nun, and peasant meek knelt round you carven cup;
- While the lucid depth where bubbles burst in silver from the sand
- Matched in some singer's heart life's fount eternal welling up.
- Blest brotherhoods that blended in this peaceful pilgrim lane
- The souls of men whose sires had fought beside you border water;
- The Holy Child did lead them then, the Saxon and the Dane:
- They knelt together on the sod once reddened with their slaughter.
- Ah God! that so in union sweet might end this modern feud,
- That side by side as brothers men knelt where once they strove;

The Holy Well

4

- Shrines may be lowly truly; and the stones be e'er so rude;
- Yet 'tis the gate of heaven itself, where they shall only love.
- The gate of heaven it is, and swept, like Luz, with angel wings;
- But alas, when rancour of the guilds had marred that peace divine
- Long ere the venal spoiler came to foul the pilgrim springs
- And pluck for self the hoarded jewels from the pilgrim shrine.
- Look up! Against the dark green wood that walls them, these late eves,
- How grandly golden glow you wheatfields in the August sun.
- Man, woman, child, to-morrow will be there to pile the sheaves;
- A common zeal shall send them; one task shall make them one.
- But here they do not come, or, coming, inadvertent pass;
- They spare no sickle to this arch for its profaning briars.

- Tis strange if once a lambkin strays to browse the tangled grass
- Erst prest by sandal of a saint, the footsteps of the friars.
- And e'en this little basin with its diamonds is not sparkling;
- Its circle in the thicket is hid with mud and weed.
- The springs which brimming fed it are so sunken, only darkling
- With the spongy stagnant ooze and the gifts of busy greed.
- For the farmer for some ailing yards of upland feared the rheum:
- So he ran to living springs his tiling down the tilth;
 And this vein to death was bleeding, and you
 vault became a tomb
- For the trickle of the clay and wealth of weedy filth.
- Up! for it hath to teach; and learn by this sad token;
- For oft by secret scheme deep-laid, for lucre only skilled.
- Sweet cisterns of the heart, whence love once flowed, are broken;
- And the pools that filled the cups of little ones no more are filled.

Or let the sad scene tell of perfume which the Lord did bless

From alabaster vase, and love's ensanguined hues, Banished from out the temple, washed to nothingness

To make a place for drab reform and comfortloving use.

His people's freewill offerings in the day when Faith was born,

Shall they shame us and against us in the judgment rise?

Nay! Cherish every dewdrop that shone on that sweet morn:

But spurn our greed, our shamefaced sloth, our niggard charities!

Farewell! thou little cranesbill, relic here of brighter days,

Pink petals, purple beak still dipping in the lonesome well,

With thy tender veinèd hand like palm outstretched for prayer;

Stay, till this tyranny be past, stay here the sentinel.

YELLOW GENTIAN

O FLOWER, thy petals hold
The sun's eternal gold,
Fast by the marge of everlasting snows;
With honeyed open ring,
For all things on the wing,
Upon the green stalk hung in tierlike rows.

Above the silver sheets
The mile-high granite meets
Heaven's temple-curtain of light-woven blue;
Where now, like incense borne
Up from an altar horn,
Only one misty cloudlet stains that holy hue.

Thy fearless form aspires
Midst thunder-cradling spires;
Death is near neighbour to thy tiny ground,
On castellated walls
Of heaven's own arsenals
Split to a thousand battlements around:

Yellow Gentian

8

Where, ever along the steep,
As if a watch to keep,
Some tower foursquare, from Titan chisel clean,
Or with rock-tortured fret
Some pinnacle is set

Above yon glacial waste and seams of living green.

And each lone tower betwixt
The parapet is fixed;
And on the breachless bastion of a land
Red rusts of age do rest;
But foot hath never prest
That cirque's enormous wall; nor ever there shall

stand.

Beneath each giant horn,

Cast off as if in scorn

In ages past, long sloping snowdrifts lie:

The iron bergs are bare;

Nor shall they brook to wear

In any storm the proffered mantles of the sky.

But beneath those milk-white slopes

See! a league-long fissure opes;

Like lawn from pearled brocade, they are torn

away.

Then from the snowy wall

The ponderous glaciers fall

To pour from sun-pierced veins each produce

of the day.

There the buried boulder laves
In labyrinthine waves
Which drop by drop the icy ceiling pours;
Till purged in cistern cool
From many a sunless pool
Gladsome they gush into the light through rainbow doors.

Whose greeting is the first
For these travellers sunward-burst
To airs life-laden, from the icy blast
Which rules where ruin raves
And dissolution paves
Drear corridors and lifeless chambers of the past?

They dance, methinks, to see
At end of darkness, thee,
The hansel sweet of this new world's delight;
So well thou dost enfold
In thy fresh green and gold
The liveliest hue of earth, the choicest of the light.

10 Yellow Gentian

Thy little brother strays,

Men say, up velvet ways

Far, far above the white eternal line;

And his blue beaker bears

To beviled brim the tears

Shed by the shivering morn in icier wastes than thine.

Heaven's very beauty burns
In his deep azure urns;
Heaven's bounty only fails his cells among;
For 'tis a newer race
Donning a lovelier grace,
Yet gates ancestral closing to a famished throng.

There, too, is built the bed
For stars of burning red;
The very spangles on the dead dry firth
Lit by the morning ray
Are not so bright as they
On the green cushions of their living earth.

But the wingèd vagabonds,
Where veins on thy broad fronds
Beneath thy gold crown seem to start and strain,
Through thy five cloven doors
To honey-laden stores,
Poor climbers though they be, ne'er climb in vain.

So, though I cannot scale
Up where a world grows pale
Amidst frore relics of an ancient scene,
Like any mountain bee
I still can joy in thee

Thou monarch of all upland flowers, of golden mien.

But these thy lavish alms,
Dust golden, Gilead balms,
Dear flower, are token of an old noblesse;
Thou hast a lineage
Drawn from a far-off age
When mendicants ne'er sued in vain, the rich could bless.

Surely, before that hour
When into soul the power
Of pity went, inbreathed by breath of God,
Long there had lived in thee
That heart of charity
Strong as thy roots here clinging to the mountain
sod.

But thou didst never toil; God gave thee gladsome oil Above thy fellows, gold upon thy brow:

Yellow Gentian

He saw that thou wert good;
Millions here found their food
Whom man who measures all thy past will never know.

And thine insects' serenades,
Blending with far cascades
And falls of ice—the music of thy land—
Will be till fiery end
Earth's harmony shall rend;
Thou here in thy appointed lot shalt steadfast stand.

THE FIRST NIGHT

THE keys have clashed; and to the touch of one The ponderous bolt has yielded; in they pass, Porter and novice, world and home both left; For from the last a father's hand and kiss Has sealed the parting but a moment since; And from the first the double gateways closed, High parapet, and still quadrangle, seem A barrier never to be passed again.

And yet, methinks, it was a gentle world
To which we rode this eve along the vale.
The waters slowly moving in the meads
Showed through their waving weeds a silver floor.
The very downs smiled welcome, fold on fold,
Sunlitten here and there; their chalky scars
Like wounds long healed were gleaming on the
green.

Then came the dim rich City, whose strait street, Descending gently with time-darkened brick, Breathed rather of old pageants that had passed

14 The First Night

Than modern tumult; and the symbol flowers,
That Faith had lent a heart to carve, bloomed there
E'en on the very stones we trod; and soon
An avenue of light-hung whispering limes
Led to the Fane's west doorways. What a glimpse
Of shaft and tinted pane, that higher seemed
To climb for ever and together passed
Into dim solemn distance! Here the world
Stands at the portal, still a proselyte,
Abashed but unanointed.

Well: they are left Home and the world: and now there is to come That unknown third, the school, which passes quite A child's poor understanding. Let him dream A moment, then; while yet that grating bolt Wakes every echo of the groined arch, And sends the boisterous rushing tide of sound Headlong from out that cavern and across Cool level reaches of the twilight court To break upon the counter precipices Amongst yon darkling bays and buttresses, And breaking die in murmurs. Let him dream. For art not thou who dost conduct him here Hight Joel in the parlance of this place? (It hath its greater Teachers; but the less Live, prophet after prophet, in the thrall Who ever keeps the keys, and ope's great doors

For this young Israel to its temple courts.) Sure 'tis a name of import for each child; For was not Joel he who once foretold Of visions that the young should see in days When on all flesh God's spirit should be poured? Let this one dream beneath these April stars A moment; ere thy charge thou wilt consign To you still chamber on the left. Maybe Thou hast brought many hither; and of all Thine ancient name so wondrous was to none As now to this one, in the hearing. Dreams? Is there not cause for them in courts like these? Five hundred summers since they sung some song Of home within them; courts the Founder laid To make his eyrie for his eagle brood. Beneath such wings he gathered from the land (Degenerate land of silken tournaments And flashy pomp and rural misery), From castle, convent, country house, and crèche All that was best; and walled it round so well That never baron tumult, civic feud, Nor puritan iconoclastic zeal, Nor creeping mist of philosophic doubt, Nor this new worship of humanity Has entered or will enter; yet whate'er Man writ meanwhile to sanctify the heart Or raise the soul was welcome; in this shrine

16 The First Night

Youth unmolested still could taste the best;
Still, Samuel-like, could listen to the Lord.
Where then, O Joel, if not here, those words
That young men shall see visions will be true?
Thou openest oft to bring the infants in;
Anointed ones who unpolluted come
Straight from a mother's arms; the Spirit and fire
Poured on their flesh has never there been
quenched;

Such holy teachings fortified the mind; Such watchfulness has kept the heart from ill. Well, if they dream in such a place, and now, No wonder, least for thee. So, stay awhile.

Seest thou a star on yonder pinnacle;
Just like a golden wandering bee that feeds
Upon the fine flower of its finial?
Say rather now it is the star of Hope.
Hope's flame is caught upon the tapering stone
And strong and steady it will burn to-night,
Nay, every night; so well this bulwark stands;
And all can tell the tale of this grey tower.
Yes, yes, two immortalities are here,
And both must bless the Founder, youth and truth.
The very Latin on his children's lips,
Their jargon caught from camp and hall and mart,
Is symbol sure of greater things that live

Within his chambers. This the vexillary
Heard once in pause of clarion and of tube.
It spells the prompt obedience and command.
It couched the bayonets for a charge that made
An empire wider. How should Hope not beam
Here over all and visibly this eve,
This eve that adds a nursling to his fold.

Hope's star is there; so fix it in thine heart. And see, still faintly burnished from the west Yon vane; it marks a southern breeze; and that Must needs be travelling from the sea; indeed These courts, for all their stillness, hold so fresh, So buoyant air, this, sure, is ocean's kiss That brushes them. But 'tis so stilly sweet The heart would fain that pilgrim of the sky Was resting on that summit, and had found There something which not all the uttermost Parts of the sailwhite seas it travelled o'er Nor e'en the sunny fields of France could give. It came amidst the sparkling watermeads; And, led up Itchen's crystal wanderings, Saw every tassel waving o'er his bed. It moved on either marge light emerald leaves And grass and orchards in their beryl bloom; Yet lingered not for all the green delights, But onward pressed to gain this slender tower

The First Night

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And, for the symbol, clasp realities.

For well thou savourest of the Unseen, sweet breeze.

Thyself the symbol of that Wind of heaven
Who wafted once the thirteen tongues of fire,
Yet lives for ever in the still small voice:
And unprofaning thou canst enter in,
And moving on the marble chapel-floor
Canst reach the crystal river from the throne;
And see on either side that tree whose leaves
Are heaven's own healing for a suppliant boy
As for all nations, and whose fruit is full
Not as in this cold clime's ingathering
But every month. O let me linger yet;
And smile not, Joel, for thy name's sake, if
One breath of air can wake such thoughts this
hour

A moment holds which never shall return.

I know not what is coming; and maybe
Rude shocks await this faith in all things here
That all are very good. But this I know
That Faith, surprised, yet shocked can never be.
And if they tell a boy, not slow of heart
So to believe it, that the very truth
Is found in every word of Holy Writ,
That boy must meet by rule of what he knows
Whate'er he sees; and those great novelties

(Mofe great than thou canst dream, to home-bred eyes)

He must interpret by this oracle. He comes amain to holy Winchester. He sees you chapel gates; there thousands trod, The patriots, heroes, saints that were to be. The records will not tell how many such; Not one that was not innocent; not one Not still convert amongst that gown-clad throng. Few fanes, I ween, could boast such proselytes. Will language less than inspiration lend Voice to this fact? Oh, rather let a child Speak as he can, to urge an argument Too great for him, when, angel-like, it stirs All the deep pools of childhood's phantasy. "There entereth nothing that defileth" there. Let him still cry astonished, as the lad Who dreamed still homesick on the Syrian waste Amongst the holy ruins of the past; "This is God's house; and this the gate of heaven."

I would that thou indeed a Prophet wert,
Then wouldst thou show the features and the
fate

Of every novice thou hast hither brought. Let be, I know some spirit there within, this eve

The last of dream of holiness, the first Of touch on hard reality, in dream, In waking dream born of the twain shall tell Things done or to be done thou knowest not.

There, where through mullioned windows genial light

Pours now, the seven famed Chambers are, you say.

So take me in.

Straight, as we entered, rose
The gowned and banded Prefect from the hearth
Where green baize decked his table, piled with
books;

And led me to an ancient escritoire,
Wooden, worm-eaten, swarthy, wonderful,
Beside a bed, my heritage; and there
Sat me upon a stool, and bade me sit
Till nine and prayers and roll-call. What a wealth
Of dates and forms grotesque embossed that desk!
Had schoolboy wit such play so long ago?
Be sure to-day 'twill not degenerate.
What tasks these scholars, with his taper each;
Each at a desk? One murmurs to himself
Close by. He learns long lists of verbs in Greek;
Legions of rude irregulars, strange hordes,
By alphabetic order bound alone.

Ah! poor Erasmus, grasp that nettle well.

'Twill serve thee some day better than those flowers,

Those smooth, sweet, brilliant flowers of graceful phrase

And honeyed comment, which they plant to make The way seem easier which thou still must climb To win the chambers where the ancients are. Grasp it; it hath a juice, therein a power, Which wanting, face to face thou wilt never speak With Plato; grasp it, though thy tender hand And all thy pleasure-loving heart revolt. I know not e'en thy name; and yet I know Thou hast not slaved within these chambers long. Thy golden hair looks hardly like the shocks Which bristle round thee on thy fellow-fags, As if day's drought, eve's frost, had half consumed The essential oil within those hatless heads. The milk and crimson roundness of thy cheek Reveals not yet the deep precocious line Which ceaseless stress and diet spare can draw. Thy delicate lips, wreathed with a constant smile, Keeps treasured there some parting scene of home:

Thine eyes are star-like, radiant thy brow.

'Tis pity if a cloud of pain e'er come

Betwixt the joy that lightens them and thee.

The First Night

22

How e'er that be, yet grasp these colourless flowers.

Yes, grasp them though the bitterness fulfil Each moment that thy menial errand leaves. Others have mourned that to persuasion deaf E'en of the plaited twigs and ashen wand To bear this seeming cross, they would it not. Bear it and love it; it will be thy crown. For dust and glare of after years will blind: And sudden then will Passion's thunder-cloud With roar and levin shake a soul like thine. Then when thy towers shall fall, thy landmarks lie All prostrate in the deluge of thy world, Oh! then, in Winton learnt, shall sound to save Deep down within thy heart a Gospel word From John's meek pen, or very syllables That burnt their way in Gentile ears from Paul: So in a pause of alpine thunder-peals When pine and hut go down the cataracts Some valley bell for ever tolling tells Of mightier than the demon of that storm.

And now their sixteen hours of day are done. The roll is called: where'er their dormitories They rest; most chiefly thrice-ten fagged cadets In this quadrangle. Call it not a day Of small things. The Almighty only knows

Its glory, wit and wisdom, and its shame, Its greatness and its littleness. A boy Is never known, how great he is: for he Wants words to tell his thoughts: yet they suspect Some greatness in him. (Vainly else they turn His eyes so oft to greatness, as akin.) Yes, he is great; and thought in him is wed With the heart's vivid impulse; greatest when Surrounded by such scenes as Venta holds; Scenes which still shame his littleness the more. So this day's deeds recording angels write; The achievements and the failures of the soul; Things which it dared; and things it did not dare; The exploits of ball and willow, foot and pen. The ivory gate of Dreams is open now; Many are pressing in. Erasmus sleeps; (And well he may; the thrall who peals at five Will thunder once upon the door at five. Woe to the boy if he be sluggish then!) While gushing in the moonlit garden nigh A brook beneath the opened casement lends Its tiny plash to landscapes far away; And like sweet Lethe soothes a sleeping world.

Or would do so, if utter wearifulness

Made not, itself, some pillows soft as down

And steeped them with a spell no poppy knows.

The First Night

24

Who art thou, slumbering there, thou black shockhead,

A sleep too deep for dreams? Whate'er thy day,
They care for thee by night; for here, 'tis known,
Thy forbears in this chamber slept on straw;
Thy father's self, may be: and sleep has tamed
This formidable form, the Prefect dire
Who vexed thy waking hours, whose every want,
Told or unspoken, it was thine to find:
He snores beside thee: and thou heedest not;
Nor of the day thou even dreamest now.
And yet a tale of those strange sixteen hours,
The toil and tortnre of them, might have raised
Some wonder, if it ever had been told,
That a child, to slave-boy changed, could bear so much.

In the dim chapel, at the hour of six,
Gathered for matins stood the serge-clad throng:
Yet then an hour ago the faggots blazed;
The fags had sped the caldrons, and anon
Bustling with boots and basins brought about
That early congregation. There is pause;
Sweet respite still ere battle shall begin,
And adoration for their daily bread.
(The daily bread will come; but not till eight.)
And who can tell how many a David drew
Strength thence to meet his giant? But what next?

The clamorous schoolroom, and the cricket-

Where spheres like comets come from busy bats, High-cinctured with its medieval wall, Give scant occasion to this cagèd bird E'en to beat breast against his prison bars; So ceaseless, so imperatively stern The Prefects' summons; and there enters soon, Controlling all those tyrant tones, but dread With new insistencies, the Masters; throned On high they take from those young rhapsodists Who file before them, firstfruits of the morn; Each with his hundred lines all learnt by heart (If in that hurly-burly heart could be), Each with his Ilian woe, or Grecian wile, Or Vergil's sweetest thought on watermeads.—Fail twice in these, the apple-twigs at twelve.

So, in breakfasting in the high-built hall Where Wykeham beams upon his seventy sons At clean-spread tables with their wooden ware The trenchers massy, brown, unbreakable, The cloud is heavy on some youthful brow; Cloud which those festal moments cannot lift, Not joke, nor hot throb of the whispering urns, Nor long-felt hunger satisfied at last.

The First Night

26

For scarce from hall descended, there is cry
For scouts upon the cricket-field; again
That ball-swept sward; where, maybe, missile swift
Hurled by man-tutor of the cricket team
A child's small hand must stop, or woe betide
The fumbler; or beside a levelled court,
Whereon the lithe but ponderous-headed bat
Is plied by giants, for that hard white thing
That darts eccentric on the uneven flints
He has a hawk's eye: or he'll feel the weight
Of that which urged it on its swift career.

But soon, from their Olympian calm again
That recketh not how humble fagdom fares,
The Masters, heralded and entering, make
Those martinets and bullies still as mice,
But have their own ideas of what should be.
One asks our little hero to explain
Before an anxious throng, themselves full oft
As Unwise ones who have not stored the oil,
Some battle details on the Ilian plain,
Or how Lavinia blushed, or Turnus' scorn
Was uttered, or the plough in Mantua made.
Alas! the tale of bricks is not complete;
Nor e'en the straw collected: how should he
Serving that busy ball-court agonise
With dictionary and grammar? So he hears

"You are idle"; and the rod that ready lies, Equipped this morn by friend's hand, or his own, At noon avenges Wykeham and his laws, Who, come what may, wills not the Muse should die.

But why prolong the comedy? This day
Will end as it began in this strange strife.
The rival glories of an ancient school,
The athlete's handiness, the scholar's skill,—
So cross are all the purposes of each,
So blinded each by pedagogic zeal
To mortal weakness and the other's need,—
Will surely leave as comes each sorrowing eve
To this poor child-apprentice of them both
Naught but their smarts and achings; still it flies,
The well-stored honey from this busy bee.

And yet (a mystery) by stealth to-day
Glimpses were given of glorious things. Not quite
Its stress could dim them; nay, a foil it was
To enhance those moments. Did the rain or sun
On hatless head, or fearful vigilance
From dewy morn till eve upon the Meads,
Or Washpot's clatter dim them? Did the din
Of that great schoolroom, unimaginable,
With flights of grammars flung at studying heads

And bully's big exactions of prompt help
To put a sparkle in his epigram;
Or strippings in the bedchambers at eve
For scullion cares? Nay, all the trouble turns
To illuminations round that page of song,
The ancient song, and lends it comment quaint,
Strange illustration; powers of strained souls
Are roused to some deep sympathy denied
To hours of studious ease: more clear and dear
The heroes move: grandly by purple isles
Ulysses fares to find his fairylands:
Achilles' plumes are on; his bronzes gleam:
And oh! will ever be so sweet again
That Dorian spring and music of the pine?

Yes; Winton of the scholar, hero, saint
In all her roughness is prolific yet.
And know thou here, who in thy weariness
Seemest a very martyr, that thy brow
Which slumbers now the slumber of the just
Shall grow to fill the mitre: and yet then
Not in thy sealings of the sevenfold gift,
Not in thy washings of the sin-stained feet,
Not in thy painful sowings of the Word
Nor all the comforts of thy pastoral rod,
Canst thou have filled a day more full than this
With ceaseless ministry to mortal needs.

But lo! the next. He murmurs in his sleep;
And dreams, perchance. Yes: on his eyes a
dream

Prophetic from the gate of horn is shed.

Ah, Herbert! thou hast acted out this day

What powers that be have spoken; and erewhile

Here in thy crib like little Hercules

Thou strangledst those twin-serpents, love of ease

And fear. Some day they'll choose thee for a

work

Few well could do, when long the powers that be Have lingered to command it: ere too late Days, hours are precious. How thy camels sail In never-resting columns to the south Into a land of anguish, brazen skies

With yon white lightning-cloud upon the verge!

Nay, but that cloud is caftans, and its gleam

The Prophet's myriad spearmen. Let it come

And burst in fury on thy bayonets;

And never stay the advance! Which nothing stays;

Not e'en thy death-wound in that victory.

Hark! louder, louder to the moon outside

The stream is babbling o'er its silver stones.—

Nay, 'tis great Nile thou hearest gurgling there

As gently on thy couch they bear thee on.

There is no mirage. Nile is reached again,

The First Night

30

Glassing in green glad breast his guardian cliffs, Brimming with all his Abyssinian snows:

And never will his ancient stream have brought A richer blessing all his countless years

Than lifting yonder steamers to their goal,

If England's choicest darling may be saved.

But thou; thou sleepest well in that lone land: And when thou wakest, Nile will cease to flow.

ESTHER

How grandly Mithras, from beyond the isles And shrines and idols of unconquered foes, Across the silences of yon green plains Where lilies loll o'er Ulai's crystal wave, Unteaches his true servants to despair. The god is clasping still his own this eve, The columns clustering on his mighty hill, The dazzling friezes of his lofty home.

And see! beneath the northern portico
Where the cool cotton lined with regal blue
Floats in vast folds, along the limpid floor
Of Susa's throne-room, princes, captains, throng
They yet could millions call to Mithras' wars
Till Mycale and Marsena 1 be avenged,
But for this dalliance and disease that dulls
The monarch's soul; but for one rebel race,
These dreamers hither driven by Assur's scourge,
Who steal the kingdom's treasures, traitor guests.

Was ever braver show than this to-day To the King's gate back streaming: hats and helms Varied as flowers of their far provinces Six score? But ever as the crested flood. Though huge the gateway, straitened there is held Or ere it bursts to sunset-flaming streets, Some mage down bending looks; for at his feet In the dark corner lies a sack-clothed man; Whose ashen cheek for paleness shames the ash That strews his hair: and some in pity look; But others in fierce scorn will "Caitiff" cry, "I know thee for a Jew: I heard thy wail This morn along the bazars; how thy form, E'en as thy faith, our god's pure splendour fouled! Thy kind are prating of a God, to whom The light and darkness are alike: who lives Beyond our stars, and holds them in his hand. And yet the city of this peerless one, Their constant tears are ever owning, lies In ruins, waiting for our monarch's nod To build. Belike they too will mangled lie Or e'er their eyes behold that bounty given." And that poor Mardochee would murmur, "Hear; Thou, who from Ur and all the ancient sin Round altars flaming for their Evening Star Didst bring our Abraham; thou, who didst command

The lions in their chamber to lie down
With thy lamb Daniel; Shepherd of Israel, hear;
Thou seest thy sheep all scattered on the hills;
The wolves are close. O let our Esther come
Our star this eye to fold us back to thee."

The palace courts are silenced: only afar Some clash of scimitar in a gateway tells How well 'tis guarded: in the hush, the hymn Of Mithras from his inmost columns steals: And, at that glory given, his wheel of light Lays its last spoke of crimson on the floor. It stains the waves of emerald-shining stone; The pearly pavements as an opal blush Beneath it; porphyry plinths all bloodier seem There, where beneath the steps of Persia's throne It falls, his finger pointing to the One Who is his Image. Then the fans are moved, The feathered fans, o'er Xerxes' mitred head, Winnowing again the glowing dusts of eve, Soothing the very axes round the throne. Strange they should carry to his heart a peace This eve, not known for years. For not the pomps Of these bright halls, not all the greeneries Of sealed gardens, fed by Hiddekel, By Pison sown on plains all pacified, Can blot the memory of a fatal morn 2

When from his silver-footed throne he saw
The foemen fill the watery gate; no slaves,
Not crawling in the corners of the sea;
But with clear pæan, and on terrible oars
They swept the sapphire waves to burst the
walls

Of all his timorous triremes, gilded beaks, Womanned, not manned: and there was Babel there

Upon the brine: his flying Dorian queen
Had sunk a royal vessel: and his rock
Had streamed around with Punic traitors' blood.
'Ah! I could weep (he thought) again for all
In that wild flight before idolaters,
The foes of Mithras whom I went to quell.
But who comes yonder—Guards, look to the gate—

To vex with one more care this harassed heart,
Or stain with one more death our headsman's
axe?

Why, it is Esther. She is looking now
With that same starlike brilliance of meek eyes
That made me once forget those darksome days,
And e'en bright Artaynta⁸: ah 'twas not
The vermeil pure that veined her olive cheek,
Nor rose-entwined bow of her sweet mouth
Whose arrows, wafted on her balmy breath,

Tipped with the nectar of sweet converse pierced

Yet soothed the heart; but ever 'twas those eyes
That moved me; when she was beside me here
And looked like that, a holier peace was
wrought;

The light of Ormuzd really seemed to bless

This peacock-plumed and bloodstained throne,
this pomp

And garish dull routine of crouching slaves.
Why did the blue eyes of a Bactrian, brought
In that last bevy,4 blind me to this star
And mar this sweet devotion? Esther, come;
And clasp this gold: and let thy fingers feel
In clasping they have half my kingdom there.'

Yes, half his kingdom, with its cruel laws
(So flashed her thought) unchanged with
Haman by.

E'en then to Oxus and Hydaspes sped His cruel couriers, and the mare-born mules ⁵ Were striking fire on many a flinty waste To tell sire, mother, children they must die. Then her heart sank beneath its glittering load Of rubies and the Indian gems of light; And the gold lace that bound her raven curls And throat more lucid far than sun-kissed snow Was tightened with her sob; sob not for fear, But for her people's doom; but yet again The cry is in the ringing of her ears, 'Help, Myrtle, help thy kindred.'

So she shall;

God from this holy weakness maketh strong:
And fasting lends a fibre to her soul
Alone in this strange wilderness, this throng
Profane, these turbaned worshippers of fire;
And raised once more on pinnacles of power
She will not tempt the Lord; nor cast a glance
To dazzle or dismay a heathen crowd.
But, for the love of His dear flock and hers,
She will be wise and wary rather now
Amongst these butchers.

Hark! tho' sure she touched,
Or ere she touched that golden rod, his heart,
Yet asks she nothing but an hour, fag end
Of this spent eve. "If it so please the King,
Let the King come and Haman to the feast
I have prepared." Ah! that was easy done.
But all her heart was trembling for the end;
When round the glittering cups and spangled floor
Her awnings hung, save where by silver rings
Looped up they let the balmy night come in
And all the stilly sounds of Susa's rest:
Or the green songster's passionate gutturals 6

Above her pointing plane-trees shook the stars.

Queen there she was once more; yet could a queen

Undo the bond already sealed with wine 7
Betwixt these two? What word of hers should pierce

The despot's seizèd ear; and yet disarm
The minion thirsting for her nation's blood?
E'en now, amidst this business of the bowls,
Her boding eyes bring close their lotted hour;
The Helbon 8 sparkling on the golden brims
Wears hues of blood; and all the crimson fringe
Upon the silver sofas which they pressed
Seems dripping blood: and, but for her fixed hope,

And but for prayer for succour from the Lord, Her soul were dark indeed in that bright hour. Ah, verily 'tis darkest ere the dawn.

Next eve naught changes in her festal scene. Again o'er glittering cups and spangled floor Her awnings hung: again by silver rings Looped up they let the balmy night come in And all the stilly sounds of Susa's rest; Or the green songster's passionate gutturals Above her pointing platans shook the stars. Yet there hath ended but an hour agone

A daylong drama strange as phantasy. As closed the feast yestreen, an angel took From Esther's human hands, too weak to serve Save with their prayer, the burden of her task. Few were the touches of that heaven-sent wand: Yet now the end is coming: first, the wings Of sleep, light fluttering o'er the monarch's eyes, Were scared away: then to his restless soul It waved a fancy, they should bring the books That told the teen and triumph of his reign: And then by that same angel mastery he, The prince who read, was guided to the page That told of Mardochee and loyalty Still unrequited! Then begins again The human comedy; each himself again Acts at his own heart's promptings. Could the King

Do ought but grieve for one more negligence Revealed; or could he ask a wiser friend
Than Haman to undo it? Challenged so
As if the guerdon were for his own meed,
Could Haman name a grander recompense?
Or could he, save to lose his master's love,
Show ought but zeal to do for Mardochee
All the choice service planned by his own lips?
And now the day hath seen it done; his hand
Brought the caparisons: and him whom then

He thought to lift upon the cruel tree

He lifted to the stirrup; and to sit

Amidst the crimson housings: and the steed

That Susa reared of rarest to the sun 9

With slow majestic pace hath borne the Jew

Through streets, by roofs, all clamorous to hail

The man whose honour is the King's delight.

And proudly still and with a seeming joy

Did Haman, groom and master of that pomp,

Grasping the golden bridle's glittering links,

Stride with the barded beast; tho' at each step

Shame banished from the face made hot the heart.

And never, now he hies to Esther's feast, Shall any drop of inner rankling mar The oil of gladness on his countenance.

In vain: in vain: no more shall word of his
Be sweet to royal ears: the gag is laid
Upon that mouth of malice: but the lips
Of Innocence can plead; and shall be heard.
See springing from the couch, not shrinking now,
Before this mimic King of kings she kneels;
And makes the prayer already heard in heaven
By Him who rules the hearts of kings; and asks
For life: then, fearless for her plea, reveals
Her tie of blood, of faith, of destiny,

With this poor Mardochee whom Haman hates;
With that sad captive race whom Haman dooms.
They say that once upon his marble throne
Set where hoarse brass compelled his human
swarms

Rose in the eyes of this proud Xerxes tears. His heart had sent them there for that sure day When every hand that grasped those myriad oars. Each hand that was to bend those Bactrian bows. Cold on its relict skeleton should lie. And did no tears, but warmer, holier, fall, Then, when in deep perplexity he turned To pace outside the thickets of sweet myrrh? Tears for a race whose doomsday he had writ? For were they not his own, whate'er their laws; He Cyrus-born 10 their shepherd; and to one Owed he not very life? And tears for her. This Esther: so his ring had sealed her doom! But then the lion that had tasted blood So oft within the despot's heart was roused: A liar ruled and wrote that cruel law: And, by his holy sire,11 that man should die!

And so he ravened for the prey when now He passed again amongst the festal lights. Ah blame her not, if then no hand of hers Was raised to shield the suppliant criminal. Was the God-Man before the Father's throne?
Were piercèd hands yet raised for sinners there
Oft as their broken heart can cry? Had Christ
Yet raised His vengeful Jewry to His height
Of guilt-forgiving love? So blame her not.
They still must cry in fierce Jerusalem,
'Let him be crucified,' ere He, the just,
Tho' crucified, should teach that men should
spare;

And choke that cry of vengeance on the lip
E'en for the worst unjust: teach Pity to speak
Over the prostrate Sepoy and his sword
Dripping with infants' blood. O blame her not
That yet that lesson tarried; hidden still
E'en from the tender-hearted and the brave.

They say she rests in Hamadan, beside
Her foster-father. If it be not so,
What matters it? Know we the very grave
Of him who chiefest turned our erring feet
To paths of safety? They do not forget,
Her race, how faith's obedience, braving death,
Won them their peace; and in the tragic courts
Still kept it, angel like. But when for both
The hour of disenthralment came to end
The purple pomps of Susa's columned halls,
Hastened they not, the captive twain, to pace

Beneath the cedarn porches far away;

And see the walls of Zion rising strong

Around the temple pinnacles: or stray

Where Kedron murmurs midst the flowers that
shame

The array of kings? "Yes!" Fancy fain would cry:

And then within the rocky walls they slept,
That garden near, where many a paschal night
The gnarled millennial moonlit olives shone;
Till there in Judah's jeopardy again
A cup was drained: and He who drained it
taught
E'en Persians 12 to be meek, and hate revenge.

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NOTES

- (1) This one of the "seven princes," "which saw the King's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom" (Esther i. 14), has been identified with the famous Mardonius, who lost his life at Platæa.
 - (2) Herodotus viii. 84, seq.
 - (3) Herodotus ix. 108, 109.
 - (4) Esther ii. 19.
- (6) Esther viii. 10. Most moderns translate "riders upon coursers and mules, the offspring of mares." But the last word might also mean "thoroughbreds." Speaker's Commentary.
- (6) The Persian nightingale (Pycnotonus jocosus): or green bulbul.
 - (7) Esther iii. 15.
- (8) Ezekiel xxvii. 18. Strabo speaks of this wine as among the luxuries of the kings of Persia (xv. 735). The village is a few miles from Damascus, and is still celebrated as producing the finest grapes of the country.
- (°) The horse as the swiftest of animals was offered by the Persians to the Sun. "Barded" in Heraldry means "richly caparisoned."
- (10) Xerxes was by his mother Atossa grandson of Cyrus the great.
- (11) The Behistan Inscription, column iv., paragraph 6. "Says Darius the King, 'Thou who mayest

be king hereafter, keep thyself entirely from lies. The man who may be a liar, him destroy utterly."

(12) "Abnegation and mildness based on the depth of the inner life, and visited by unmerited misfortune, made the power of the first and famous Imans, Ali, Hassan, and Hussein, over the popular imagination. 'O brother,' said Hassan, as he was dying of poison, to Hussein who sought to find out and punish his murderer, 'O brother, let him alone till he and I meet together before God.'

"Could we ask for a stronger testimony to Christianity? Could we wish for any sign more convincing that Jesus Christ was indeed, what Christians call Him, the desire of all nations?"—M. Arnold, A Persian Passion Play, in Essays on Criticism (1st Series).

LAUD

THE August azures float on high,
Like canopies of hue divine;
On bronze and chiselled bravery
Heaven's noontide solemn splendours shine;
As if no foot did ere intrude
Upon this sculptured solitude,
This hushed hypethral shrine.

And yet full sure yon vault is bent
On other sanctuaries as fair,
And pinnacle and battlement
Cut from the heaven a temple there:
And in their dreaming silences
Each stone of theirs as loudly cries
Upon as charmed an air.

Their love for others; this for me:
Here is Time's golden fruit most sweet;
But quick, or, ere it gathered be,
Some careless unobservant feet

Marring this spell with sound might pass
To find on yonder garden grass
The chestnut-shaded seat.

Come! read the Founder's dream aright;
Read ere the power to read be gone.
This Joseph dreamed one fatal night,
And told his dream upon the stone.
Sooth, for the very pride of it
His brethren put him in the pit,
For all he would have done.

Dream of a king who stood among
The dainty semblances of art,
And westward, in a daintier throng
That pictured all the heavenly heart,
Watched loverlike the golden glow
Of ringlets on his consort's brow
As nevermore to part.

He told it to his own: and then
From this familiar cloistral shade
Into hot glare and seas of men,
Where history by the strong is made,
He passed; and preached in hall and fane
The vision seen and stamped amain
O'er yon twin colonnade.

He showed the beauty of a king;
And Faith should not be far away;
To every council Faith he'd bring;
Faith he would wed with royal sway;
Faith's altars, at the king's command,
Not desecrate, again should stand
As in an ancient day.

This Stuart can love unto the death!

His sceptre, which once smote the sea

Wielded by great Elizabeth,

For folding sheep a stave should be:

Her captains were a glorious line;

But now, to match their own, should shine

The deeds of prelacy.

Sweet Music's eyes to heaven are cast;
Her look is gentle on the stone;
Far from the camp and clarion blast
Her hand shall wake each tender tone;
And her new organs raise above
The heart in mysteries of love.
Before a viewless throne.

She too is on the steps of heaven,
Philosophy, drawn higher
By look yon Charity hath given,
Where Athens self could not aspire.

E'en Rhetoric, cold in utterance, Is kindling from the same fond glance To match the tongues of fire.

A very galaxy of grace
Along the paven gallery smiles:
And, each with dower of such a face,
His angels wing the northern isles,
In minster high and village shrine
The old rich ritual divine
To teach by winning wiles;

Yes, while the halcyon days shall last,
To brighten in Religion's hour
All tarnished glories of the past,
And sweeten all the modern sour;
Coercing with a holy bann
The long loud preachments Puritan
In that brief day of power.

How in the sun these features glow
And smile for aye, a fairy ring!
But such an August long ago
Was radiant on a living king;
When through the wide-flung college doors
A court was in these corridors
For noble banqueting.

See! Laud is leading in his Guest;
And England's rarest follow there
For peace and grace serenely drest
Round Navarre's daughter, small and fair.
Tall Rupert can't be dreaming on
More battles ever to be won,
He seems so debonair.

Joy now: then weeping, City dear.

Thou art the home of causes lost.

And thou shalt never staunch the tear

For the brave doomed thou lovest most.

See! Fate has shattered Hope's last lamp

And from the northern canting camp

Charles, baublewise, is tost:

Yet flags in thee are never furled;
Thou art the city of the soul:
And not a voice has waked the world
But from thy stones its echoes roll.
Soul cannot quench her inmost fire;
And memory turns to strong desire
Whene'er thy vespers toll.

Thou art the sanctuary for this cause:

Its watchword still yon symbols mean.

Beyond the archway without pause,

O'er sunny sward and garden scene,

Glad trumpets in the elm-tops blow As if that Court still strayed below And Naseby ne'er had been.

Young student eyes each sculptured form,
So mutilate yet fair, behold:
And still a king in civil storm
This chivalry of hearts might hold;
And their allegiance be to him
More precious than all ships that swim,
More than an empire's gold.

Here Faith shall never fail to find
Some new crusader for her war;
Best for herself she moulds the mind
Where all the radiant Muses are.
Close shall he cling here to his nurse;
The closer, better to rehearse
What must be preached afar.

If men should hold their peace, these walls
Have voices never out of date;
And every marble column calls,
Attuning his novitiate,
Of arches with full-rounded span
Lifting long vaults basilican
To martyrs dedicate.

Hard by beneath rich orient glass
Where sound eve's changeless liturgies,
A blazon spells on gleaming brass
Who there below the altar lies;
One to whom martyr's raiment given
Is foretaste of that inmost heaven
Where the Lamb is as slain.

Well has he stored you libraries
With treasures from the pagan East:
What are they to one Sacrifice,
One duteous eucharistic feast?
In sooth they build his monument,
The savours sweet from altar sent
By humblest hamlet priest.

Worn are these stones, yet unseen breath
Can make the thought that carved them burn;
As whitest ashes all beneath
By sudden gust to crimson turn.
Loyalty's flame shall here be fanned;
And Faith shall snatch her brightest brand
From this loved funeral urn.

For waits she not a deadlier strife?

How cased in steel the foeman gleams!

Alas! his cold mechanic knife

Is searching the warm circling streams,

As if soul-secrets blood could tell;
And life in his fierce crucible
But lime and carbon seems.

And the ark is with the Philistines;
And Holy Writ a stranger's gain!
Each morn from the unanointed lines
Goliath's challenge sounds again.
Quick, with the smooth stones of thy brook!
With choice words, David, of the Book
Pierce that blaspheming brain.

And in this scene, where science rears
Fantastic palaces around,
Her Babel heightening with the years,
Shall any Zion yet be found?
Yes! newer refuges like this
Where Faith ungagged and Learning kiss
Shall seize the apostate ground.

SOUTHWARDS

From Bens, e'en vaster than they seemed,
Their morning mists were rolled;
And many a brown heath there had gleamed
Touched to a russet gold.

And, opening down a granite pass, A rock-hung lake was bright Changed to a world of shining glass And leagues of living light.

Such Caledonia's closing scene.

The morning was so still
On gowans gilding upland green
And battle-haunted hill.

Then southward on the iron track We mount the storm-swift tire: And towns fly past, a vision black, Of toiling Lancashire.

Southwards

Without us now, still southward torn
Are sped those roaring cars;
'Tis peace again: 'twas first of morn;

But now beneath the stars.

All tumults of the seas.

This forest of romance.

54

We ride where lights and shadows blend.

Moon-blanched and arched with trees

The smooth road seems a port where end

'Tis silence deep: it is not fierce,
This splintering of each lance
By which the moon's mute armies pierce

Again still moonlit fields around:
And what enhanced bliss
Prevailing to the utmost bounds
Of the ancient hills is this?

Quite lowly is their darkling verge;
With scarce distinguished rim
Each in the other seems to merge
With all their boskage dim.

And lowly are the lakes that lie Within their folding arms. Salopian meres may never vie With Leven's storied charms:

And the soft splendour raining down From you high firmament To the familiar welkin brown This magic hath not lent.

Whence comes it? Whence the grace it owns?
Why hath this brook a glory
As though from royal walls, famed towns,
It poured to us the story?

'Tis so, because in this dim bound First fell on childhood's ear Time's thrilling deed; the very ground Where they were done seemed here.

Here Fancy took her magic wand And here her spell she wove; And filled with visions from beyond The hill, the lake, the grove.

Ţ

For some great cause men had not fought On any ancient heath But here the bannered lines she brought And told the tale of death.

Ne'er in anointing of a king
Was lit a regal hall
But the good news this brook did bring;
On it the radiance fall.

No queen discrowned had ever wept, Caged in some tragic tower, While moonlit waters round her slept But here she had her hour.

If upon orphan babies mild
That coverlet, leafy green,
In any wood the birds e'er piled,
Here sure that wood hath been.

Yes! Fancy with her teeming rod
Hath struck the glimmering bound;
And each inglorious loneliest sod
Is made her holy ground.

So those far heights, at morn so grand, Resign their storied pride, Lending their lore to this low land Where homeward now we glide

Through fen-born mists which moonbeams change

To silver on the leas,

While thatched cot and slated grange

Sleep in their stirless trees.

Here Memory too grants second sight;
With Fancy she conspires
To make this landscape a delight
And feed those patriot fires.

She hath a richer chamber yet
Beyond these long-drawn halls;
The heart's best jewels there are set
In glory on the walls.

Yes! yonder is the final turn
Where campions, high and white,
With many a lustrous candle burn
For wanderers of the night.

Past that, there will be an outline dim In midnight's splendid rains; The faint blue Cambrian mountains swim High o'er the peaty plains.

Thence Bala's limpid fountains feed Yon canal's weedy flood Which glitters now o'er every weed Behind the piny wood.

Northwards still woodlands guard afar The caldron of White Mere; But ask of yon white peeping star What swans are sleeping there.

The near wood too, with silver beech Veining green gloom, is fair; But all the pixies could not teach What flowers are folded there.

The turret rears its silent bell
That calls so oft to prayer;
But all you headstones could not tell
What saints are sleeping there.

Only the manse's groves among A faint and fitful flare; Yet who could tell in any song What joys are waiting there?

Envoi

Ingrate! it never failed; that balm
Of Gilead e'er was thine;
The haven's sweet unpurchased calm
After the stormy brine.

That midnight's splendour and boon air Broke from a height of heaven: So broke on thee love waiting there In tender greeting given;

Given only for thee soon to spurn, Ill bartering thy repose. Did seas to which thou didst return Give any grapes like those?

THE SECRETS OF ISIS

O'ER thy throbbing breast
The golden globes rise;
On it, rocked to its rest
The white lily lies;
Each a star; yet what are they to that star in thine eyes?

For by yonder eyot
Thy wavelet that broke
In a bright tiny riot
Was a passion that spoke.
Was it pride, was it hope that glanced in thy look?

Proud hope for the things
Thou art sent to adorn
Where with footsteps of kings
Great stairways are worn;
While on thy broad waters their navies are borne.

But here there is hush
On thy baby wave;
But a sen'night's mild gush
From the coraline cave
Where the purple did swathe thee, the purple rush.

The Windrush has stolen
From the same mother hills:
Yet what art thou, though swollen
With his rock-salted rills?
A cup for the little, the little one fills.

Not soon, though he creeps
Fast and forcible, nursed
In his blue clayey deeps
'Neath the many-springed hurst,
Shalt thou see through thy sedges thine Evenlode burst.

Ah! the weight of the streams
That from many a lea
Or where the chalk gleams
Shall glide into thee,
Ere thou feel on thy forehead the kiss of the sea!

62 The Secrets of Isis

Yet so small, yet so proud!

Thou art but a child;

Thy weirs are not loud

In this hush of the wild:

And 'twas but a sen'night thou wert born of a cloud.

So stay for a while;

Nay, thou must: thou art caught
In the bays of you isle;

Till well thou art taught
The lore of this forest to which thou art brought.

Already to meet thee
An alder has strayed
So headlong to greet thee
On thy breast he has laid
The scent and the hue of his inmost glade.

Thy current rolls
(Stay and list to this song)
Of the grey green boles
To no denser throng;
No oak leaves flutter, other tops among,

So emerald bright
As these that ride,
Waves curling in light
On a flowing tide,
Till they break far away on the coral hillside.

And if aught can consume,
Solstice fire, beetle bold,
The verdurous spume,
Yet with life uncontrolled
Tossing sunward again those green seas are rolled.

And amongst them there heaves
Many a darker dome
Of the elm-tree leaves
Where the samara bloom
To the summer wind wafts its flying foam.

And up from the clay

The ash tree springs;

From gloom to the day

And its azure it flings

The whispering cloud of its myriad wings.

64 The Secrets of Isis

There the primrose, far under
The elder bowers,
Is pale-red for a wonder;
And, a healer of powers,
The cinque-foil creeps with the velvet flowers.

And in that dim wood,
Drooping lips of cream
With their snowy hood
Might a butterfly seem;
But in perfumed eve 'tis an angel's gleam.

The wine is not spent
In earth's boiling urns;
The sap is still sent,
And the maple-twig burns,
And each wingèd key to crimson turns;

And the gelder selfsown

Sets the large white ray

Round the flowerets brown,

Till her gems are gay

For tangled miles of the woodland way.

One watery dell
Feeds a laurel rare;
When the sunbeam fell
On its lilac hair
Twas a cluster of amethysts gleaming there.

But they bared last spring
By their woodman's craft,
Many a glorious ring,
Many a sinewy shaft,
And brothers bled 'neath the ashen haft

Once more to be thine!

For, maybe, on thy flood,

Moving on to the brine,

Some son of this wood

Shall ride, and shall serve, as thou, man's good.

But believe me, O river,
On thy glassy breast
Thou shalt mirror never
Such sylvan rest
As this with the seal of solitude pressed.

66 The Secrets of Isis

So go down to thy gardens:

By the moonlit parterre

The samite-clad wardens,

As in Enna fare,

Brushing rarest blooms in a scent-laden air;

And on the shorn lawn
The acacias dream
Of their Indian dawn;
While the silver gleam
Lines their waving wings' shadow cast on thy
stream.

But none of those treasures
Of the giant bower
That in ampler measures
Into ether tower
Match these pale grey boles o'er the wilding flower.

And from heaven's high sluices
In you misty blue
This sweet wood entices
The balm-dropping dew;
Like as veins on the hill to thine artery flew.

The Secrets of Isis

67

So she is thy sister;
Ye two conquer all death:
When here thou hast kissed her,
The dew of thy birth
Shall slake in the summer sore thirsts of the earth.

So for ever may trees,

Verdant line upon line,

Here toss their green seas;

And the honeyed woodbine

Round stems stout and rugged in spires ever twine.

EVENING AND MORNING

WE stormed up the stairs, full a hundred to clamber;

And we asked the great Castle to yield us its pride:

The gates were flung open; and was there a chamber,

A corridor dim to our rapture denied?

The swords of old wars, the gold-gleaming vestries,

Gems, arras, and all that through ages can last, And the hunters we saw on vast faded tapestries; Through the green silky boskage they were sending their blast.

Nay; gems left their caskets; long parted, they found her:

Their princess had stepped from her frame on the wall;

- And those swords had hands on them, and were flashing around her
 - Midst the glories and grace of those passionate halls.
- It was more than a dream; than a story far better; Art so well through her darlings the great ones had wrought,
- On the boards they once trod, we knew to a letter How a sovereign had smiled on a hero who fought.
- Or, in those grand oriels that to glories of summer To breathe on the vaulting ope all their high glass,
- How whispered a queen making mute maiden
 - As they gazed where the dances swept by on trim grass.
- Back through time! on this terrace, whither forth we have wended,
 - Sure a young monarch fared: and watched in eve's light
- How the work of his grandsire's great builder was ended;
 - How each tower and each coin from his chisel shope white.

70 Evening and Morning

Look! up on the Round Tower how breezes have lifted

Regal lion and harp on the woven expanse:

But then, for fair Richard, those huge folds were gifted

With the prize of late battles, the lilies of France.

Sunset flaming as now he saw his green counties; He looked upon that which knows not of change.

No tears and repenting for Nature's sweet bounties! There's a throne for all hearts in that verdurous range.

There Thames through his woodlands, as knighterrant gleaming,

Came serving all comers who wait on his marge, And the lilies were there and the swans on his streaming

As he bore from the stairway each gay-freighted barge.

And down there the brown songster trilled her passion of ages;

Peerless descantere then yonder bowers among:— No vesper-bell there yet called to their cages

Boy-birds to re-echo the Latian song:-

- While the samite-clad throng and the viols were greeting
 - The anointed boy fresh from his London's applause!
- Peace and righteousness then for a moment were meeting;
 - Eyes held joy, and hearts hope, for the throne and the laws.
- We, too, 'neath the bastions, now grey and stormbeaten,
- Descry the same verdures, a meek rustic band; Now too hope and joy for tasks humbler shall sweeten
 - Revelations of glory from watchtower and land.
- The vassal south-east still that standard is heaving; It brings the sweet dues from some Indian scene.
- Royal guardsmen pass by us with tramp watchrelieving.
 - In the brunt of what battles those bearskins have been!
- Ah! grand was the sunset, and rich the king's scarlet.
 - Why leaped then each splendour to crimsoner flame?

72 Evening and Morning

And why did some twilit eyes sudden seem starlit?

What's this touch in the breeze that before never came?

Ah! my soul, thou canst answer; yet ne'er shall be spoken

A rough tale, idly daubing the hues of a dawn.

When the silence of light on morn's pathways find token,

Oh, then shall Love waking by pictures be drawn!

THE MERCIAN MARCHES

How the dimples curl and whirl, yet ever run
Towards the sun.

Southward as to something that the river loves Fast it moves;

And the peaty plains that woo it on its way, Yet ne'er stay,

With the ladysmock's pale blushes, flowering rush, See it gush

Till it finds the trove at last behind the pines, You dark lines;

And that dimpling cheek shall touch, at end of race, Severn's face.

How this moving of the waters fix a scene That hath been.

Up to azure Cambrian cairns and lava passes Light amasses,

Like a glory long ago in Deluge day When they lay,

74 The Mercian Marches

Ravaged forests in their black and fern-dressed graves,

Whelmed by waves!

- And the bison and the auroch wandered free On this lea.
- See! the cattle, horses, colts, that yonder stray
 Might be they.
- When this stream first from its spongy cradle ran, Not a man
- Launchèd coracle on ancient cauldron lakes; In the brakes
- Hunter never grasped in daylong vigilance Flinty lance
- For the prize in a grim combat ceaseless waged, Mammoth caged.
- All along you fir-fringed summits was the same,
 Flowers aflame;
- But the last thing in his garden God would set Was not yet.
- Motherland of men and heroes, what a nook
 As I look
- In thy very midmost bosom here is found!

 In this bound,
- Welkin green round sea of peat and piny isles, Many miles,

Not a man moves; not a farm makes, or a cot, One red blot.

Yet the huntsman in a morning there, I know, Is not slow;

And an hundred, each beneath its shading oak, Hearths do smoke.

Pardon, nurse of men, if now by chance of morn
Visions born

Of this solitude and silence cherish thought

How God wrought

With His waves and fire and ice, of you fair verge Demiurge;

Till his zons drew each lovely mountain line Opaline;

And the moth came to the flowers and palmy scene Pleiocene;

But his cradle waited yet the paragon, God's true son.

So this smock's sweet silver cross which blushing dips

Tender tips

In an umber-tinted wave that ever streams Blushed, it seems,

Just as now above the swift abounding rings, Far off springs,

76 The Mercian Marches

- When no creature, come to water from its feast,
 Antlered beast,
- Or the monster sheathed in grizzle, of red eye, Prowling by,
- Or the wood-bull with his pale mild yellow stare,

 Marked it there.
- Was it this that stemmed his tears whose love was thine,

Celandine?

- Here beside the mustard's star the very silt

 Thou hast gilt,
- Where a gudgeon sunward rose, and following him Bubbles swim.
- Thou hast kept the happy glitter of thy gold, Never old,
- Blazing ere a heart had any hopes or fears, Myriad years.
- Was it passionless life like this one morn to gain Conquered pain?
- Yet a very baby thou wert then among
 That sweet throng
- In the eocene Edens, ere the glacial breath

 Dealt its death.
- Where the cattle-dotted moorland southwards weeps, You blue steeps

- Hold dead grandeurs and lost glories of thy kind;
 There the wind,
- On the broken tombs, still kisses a flower world Skyward hurled:
- On the ageless Cambrian rock and twisted scar
 The ancients are.
- There the Titan milestones to the past can speak Peak to peak.
- Yes! you mountains in a spell of cloudless weather Sing together;
- In a rarer August sunset (not as now Hazy glow),
- All the crags of golden brand, the shale and schist, Amethyst,
- Blood-red, crimson, rosy flame, or purple pale, Tell their tale.
- Silenced voices of lost zons on no hill;
 Then are still;
- And the chords of colour vast by ages spanned Thrill this land.
- But among them all high Wrekin takes the throne Fire-wrought stone;
- While the pulse of earth's hot heart for ever stirs All his firs.

78 The Mercian Marches

Others hold the cone and fern-frond, and descried How they died:

Only he on his lone watch-tower of the ages Memory's pages,

When the firmament first covered earth's fierce urn,

Knows to turn.—

Yet he loves above all wonders of the fire This fair shire.

Never flashed a light, never trod a giant then Like its men.

God doth cast His ice like morsels; and this fire Naught can tire.

Yet the mallow here and thistle's spearlike plume Joyous bloom

By His ice-paths, o'er the plain of peat that drowns Pines and towns;

And up yonder all His curtains are as light Sapphire bright

O'er the wastes where molten rocks in torrentburst

Did their worst;

And betwixt these ruins twain, He's manifest:
Who else dressed

Meads in velvet, oaks in emerald; pines in legion Spared the region?

- "O your Edens are a dream: God did not plan All for man.
- Nor for you there's working now in yonder flowers New-found powers;
- They add cubits to their stature; toil and spin;
 Races win.
- Not for you this landscape stretches, plain and air Passing fair."
- Yes, so fair, by naught with pencil ever limned
 This is dimmed;
- And to think of, e'en when heart-clouds darkest roll

Lifts the soul.

- Yes, this science would annul the raptured glory
 Of the story
- How the Fifth morn saw from ocean's teeming fount

Eagles mount;

- Fairy frond fanned mute mastodon in the wood;
 All was good;
- And the lion lit by lilies found his lair;
 All was fair.
- Then for summing of Earth's ages there was pause;
 Ere their cause,
- Eye to see it, heart to feel it, lips to name, God-built came.

80 The Mercian Marches

Yes; this science loud that angel voice hath drowned,

"Holy ground."

Not by lavishment, forsooth, of heavenly love Floweret throve;

But itself, for bargain with a butterfly, Forged its dye.

So her blue divine to catch some vagabond Borage donned;

By yon iris, bettering any gay coquette, Cap is set

Where as oil laid up in vessels of the wise Nectar lies.

Hail! thou summer wind; away those voices pass;
And the grass

Which thou bendest with its every glittering blade

Answer made

That the prying scope and scalpel shall not know All below

E'en the tenderest texture of the humblest weed; In its seed

Lies a mystic thing ne'er reached by all their lore.

Best to adore,

Best to love it, as if first it tinged earth's brown, Lightlike sown. And thou tellest too of matin incense rolling Where pine pollen,

Sulphur masses, russet cones, in their dim hall, Virgins all,

Priest and nun, beneath the domed and fan-traced ceilings,

List the pealings

Of high organs and the soft eolian chanting, While the slanting

Beam of sunlight makes in needle-matted aisles Crimson isles;

List that chanting, and shall list it, till the last Trumpet blast.

Still one message more upon thy scented wing Thou dost bring.

For as earth in dereliction once did run From her sun;

And was shedding for sad space of wintry years Frozen tears

Till her cheek, all warm with beauty, purple bloomed,

Deathlike gloomed;

So by sin now of man's intellectual pole Glaciers roll;

Soon to pass with all their icy hails that hiss Cast to the abyss.

F

82 The Mercian Marches

For thou breathest that a singer soon shall rise:

Melodies

He will make; and sudden every bush will burn,

Every fern;

And the flowers, redeemed from formalists and grown

Cup to crown

Golden volumes, velvet ethers flecked with light

Topaz bright,

Shall be mocking knives that probe them, words that name,

Very flame.

Yet the song is but revealing of gifts given From high heaven.

O thou cumbered with thy carbon and thine iron,

This Amphion

Thee to thee, my England, dearer than thy pelf,

Thine own self,

Unsullied as in infancy shall show:

Then the bow

The Mercian Marches

83

Like an emerald o'er the throne shall light thy hills;

All thy rills

Smooth as sea beneath it of fire-mingled glass Swift shall pass;

And a glory as from Gates of Pearl surprise

Thy sweet skies.

THE DEATH OF DIDO

(VIRGIL, Æn. 296-705)

But Dido heard them plotting, ere they move,—Did any ever dupe the ear of love?

The days had been so quiet, she had feared:
And soon blab Rumour with her tale appeared
Of yard-arms rigged and decks for sailing cleared.
Forth through the city she is raving now,
Pain at her heart, and fever on her brow.
So starts in Thebes the mummer, when she hears
The revels break the silence of three years.
Loud then the shout of each bold bacchanal:
And all night long the mountains seem to call.

Then seeking out Æneas, she began:-

- "And didst thou hope to hide it, treach'rous man?
- "Didst hope to hide a deed like this from light,
- "And from my shores in silence steal thy flight?
- "Is our love nothing, and thy plighted faith,
- "And Dido soon to die a piteous death?

- "What! busy building ships in stormy stars,
- "In teeth of all the north to clear the bars!
- "Hard man! if those thou seekest were thine own,
- "Not alien lands and settlements unknown,
- "And to thine ancient home thou hadst to fly,
- "Should Troy be sought when waves run mountains high?
- "'Tis me thou flyest! By these tears that flow,
- "By thine own troth,—no more is left me now—
- "Oh! by that primal hour that made us one,
- "By all our marriage rites but now begun,
- "By all thou ow'st me, all my love has been,
- "Pity the downfall of a ruined Queen,
- "And turn thee from thy purpose! 'Tis for thee
- "Tyrians estranged and Libyan hate I see,
- "And ah! sole passport to the realms above,
- "The name once mine is bartered for thy love!
- "Friend, in whose halls must I be left to pine?
- ("Friend is the name, though husband once was thine")
- "Am I to wait till fierce Pygmalion comes
- "To wreak a brother's vengeance on these homes,
- "Or the black Moor whom once I scorned to wed.
- "Iarbas, lead me to a captive's bed?

- "Oh! had I from thee, for a farewell grace,
- "Clasped to a mother's breast one darling face;
- "And in this hall one little boy at play
- "Might feature still his father far away,
- "The guilt of my betrayal had been less,
- "Nor all unsoothed my widowed loneliness."

She finished. He, Jove's mandates to obey,

Fixed on the ground his calm unwandering eye:

The struggling care that on his heartstrings broke

He smothered there, and thus in brief he

spoke:—

- "Never, my Queen, shall aught forgotten be
- "Of that uncounted debt I owe to thee.
- "Ah me! while thought and breath to me belong,
- "Eliza's sweet. Now list, but not for long.
- "No more 'tis true this plan I thought to hide
- "Than torch or contract lured thee to my side.
- "If Fate had given me to repose my life
- "E'en where I would, and end this weary strife,
- "The smoking ruins of my own dear Troy
- "To raise, to cherish, were my lasting joy;
- "Priam's high halls in ancient state should stand,
- "And a new Fortress guard the vanquished land.
- "But now in sunny Asia many a voice
- "Heard from the sun-god's shrines leaves love no choice.

- "All point to that great Calf-Land o'er the foam.
- "That is my lawful love, and that my home.
- "The towers of Carthage and a Libyan hearth
- "Thou lov'st to keep, yet Tyrians gave thee birth;
- "And shall not Teucer's son at freedom fly
- "To seek new homes beneath Ausonia's sky.
- "Me too a father's form, what time the night
- "Spreads the dank shades, and stars rise fiery bright,
- "In dreams oft warns me; oft the troubled look
- "Of that pale spectre seems to speak rebuke.
- "And can I young Ascanius long detain
- "From that great kingdom which the Fates ordain?
- "'Twas e'en but now from Jove came flying down,—
- "By thy dear life I swear it, and mine own,-
- "Heaven's message-bearer—through the walls he trod
- "Bright in the beaming halo of a god,
- "And these ears drank his accents. Stir no fire
- "In me and thee; 'tis Heaven's, not my, desire."

Her eyes quick moving, though away she turned, Had watched him long: now into speech she burned;

- "No goddess woman was true dam of thine,
- "No Dardanus the author of thy line;
- "On flints of Caucasus thy cradle stood;
- "A tigress there put dug to thee for food.
- "Yes; for 'tis folly longer to refrain!
- "Can darker villany than this remain?
- "Did all my sobs call forth one pitying sigh,
- "Or wring one tender teardrop from his eye?
- "And what shall indignation first record?
- "Now Heaven's great Mistress and Saturnian Lord,
- "Look down on Right no longer: Faith is gone;-
- "Shipwrecked I took him, placed him on my throne,
- "Infatuate that I was-from ocean's grave
- "His shipmates rescued, kindliest shelter gave-
- "Ah me! the maddening thoughts!—They're busy in heaven;
- "The sun-god's self to prophecy is given;
- " And now, for pious pilgrims, from the skies
- "Their message-bringer to the rescue flies,
- "And bears the startling mandate-such low care,
- "Such labours vex those quiet Lords of air:-
- "I combat not thy words, nor thee detain;
- "Go, seek a kingdom o'er yon billowy main,
- " Let the winds find thee Italy, to drink
- "If those good gods can punish, as I think,

- "Some bitter draughts, and Dido to implore
- "With rocks all round and breakers' deafening roar.
- "I shall be near thee in dark smouldering fires,
- "And when my spirit in cold death expires,
- "My shadowy Form shall never leave thy track:
- "Then, perjured Trojan, shalt thou pay me back;
- "And, as I listen far below, shall come
- "To the great Dead the message of thy doom!"
 Abrupt she ends, and flying from the day,
 Listing no word of all he fain would say,
 Faint with the force of passion, tears away;
 Now in her women's arms she hangs as dead:
 O'er marble floors they bear her to her bed.

Deep groans the good Æneas, and for love
The firm foundations of his purpose move;
And sore he yearns to follow, and console
With kindly words the anguish of her soul;
Yet to the fleet they launch upon the strand
He goes, unswerving to the God's command.
Then zeal was doubled in the Teucrian crew,
Then down the beach their towering ships they
drew;

The pitch'd keels swam: from forest depths they bore

The foliaged timber for the unhewn oar,

90 The Death of Dido

All eager to be sailing. From the town
Pours the whole tide of emigration down.
As when ants spoil a mighty pile of grain,
Their swarming armies blacken on the plain,
Ere winter come: some shoulder on the load
Of each huge grain along the narrow road;
Some urge the straggling troops that move too
slow.

And the whole path with bustle is aglow.

From her high turret Dido viewed the scene;
Ah! then what pangs are thine, unhappy Queen?
What groanings thine when ocean and long shore
Stir, as thou look'st, and send the mingled roar.
Ah! heaven-born Love, of little ruth thou art
When for thy tasks thou hast a human heart.
To tears again, to try how prayers may move,
She turns; and Anger must succumb to Love,
Lest she should die the death she must in vain,
While hope still lives, and aught untried remain.

- "Anna! thou see'st their crowd upon the seas,
- "The sterns are wreathed, the canvas calls the breeze.
- "Sore is this pang, yet I foresaw the blow,
- "And to the issue can endure it now.
- "Yet, sister, grant me this: to thee alone
- "The inmost thoughts of that false Man are known;

- "By quiet paths thou stealest to his mind,
- "And all his yielding moments thou canst find.
- "Kneel, sister, to that proud one, friend no more,
- "Tell him I ne'er with Greeks on Aulis' shore
- "Joined oath to uproot his Troy; no keel of mine
- "E'er flew to fire his towers across the brine.
- "Stirred I his father's ashes, that my prayer
- "Assails his ear, yet may not enter there?
- "Where flies he? Let him wait—'tis love's last prayer,—
- "Till flight is easy, and the winds are fair.
- "I ask not now the wedlock I have lost,
- "Or that he stay from his fair Latian coast,
- "And lose his destined kingdom: my behest
- "Is but one span of respite and of rest,
- "Till Fortune, mistress o'er my vanquished will,
- "Shall teach me too to suffer and be still.
- "Pity thy sister, grant the boon I ask;—
- "And Death shall pay thee double for the task."

Such was her prayer, pathetic with her tears,
And such her sister, oft returning, bears.
But prayers are powerless, tears too soft, to
move

The ear now deafened to the voice of love By Fate's resisting purpose. As the oak, Which gales all buffet, grasps its Alpine rock,

72 The Death of Dido

And, hale with timber of a thousand springs, Its quivering stem the rustling leaflets flings, Deep carpeting the ground; as high in air It mounts above, as low 'tis rooted there; So the firm hero felt in every part Their prayers incessant vibrate to his heart; But, though perforce the idle teardrops roll, No words unfix the purpose of his soul.

And now the Queen, by fates resistless driven, Makes choice of death; she loathes the vault of heaven:

Now, too, sad sign to quit the shining skies,
A direful sight defiles her sacrifice;
She pours, and darker grows the ruby wine;
Horror! there's blood upon the blazing shrine.
And yet such portent of her coming death
To none, not e'en to Anna, does she breathe.
Lo! where the Chapel to her lord of old
Within her palace stands, of marble mould,
Dressed in white coronals and festal sprays,
And all the honours that affection pays;
There unmistaken accents of the dead
Are calling her when night is overhead;
And the lone owl that on the towers complains
Ends in a wail his melancholy strains.

And warning words which holy prophets spoke
With a fresh horror on her memory broke:
And now she flies, through landscape of her
dreams

Æneas self; now uncompanioned seems
Where always, on a way that never ends,
Seeking her people through a waste she wends.
As in the mimic show mad Pentheus sees
The vengeful armies of the Eumenides,
And Thebes shows double to his swimming gaze,
And double suns with double lustre blaze;
Or when the mother's torch and serpents black
Fast o'er the stage pursue Orestes' track,
He views, as safe he mounts the sanctuary stair,
The ministers of vengeance crouching there.

Pain wins; and madness is conceived now:

She has willed to die; and planned in stealth the how;

And thus poor Anna duping she belies Her heart's dark purpose with her smiling eyes.

[&]quot;Tis found; the charm this anguish to destroy,—

[&]quot;Come, greet thy sister with a sister's joy,-

[&]quot;The charm to bring him to thy side again,

[&]quot;Or ever free me from my lovesick pain.

94 The Death of Dido

- "By setting suns and ocean's verge there lie
- "Far Ethiop lands, where all the star-set sky
- "Turns on vast Atlas' shoulders: there I found,
- "Attendant on the Hesperids' holy ground,
- "A priestess of Massylian race: 'tis she
- "Who feeds the dragon guardian of their tree
- "And all its golden load: and honey spreads
- "Upon his cake, and slumbrous poppy seeds."
- "Hers is the power in these to ease the heart,
- "On those to fix the agonising smart;
- "To stay the rushing of a torrent's wrath,
- "Or turn a planet backward on its path.
- "Forth at her chant the dead at midnight troop.
- "Down from the mountain tops the ashes stoop,
- "And loud the earth moans under:—not that I
- "Would fain have armed me with this sorcery-
- "I swear it, sister, by thine own dear love,
- "Swear it by all the powers that move above!
- "Do thou, then, to my inner court retire:
- "There skywards build in stealth a mighty pyre:
- "Then from the chamber whence the false one fled
- "Carry his arms, the couch where shame lies dead,
- "And all he ever doffed; she bids the flame
- "Take all of his whom never more I name."

She ended; and her tell-tale lip grew pale.

Yet Anna bodes no dying in the tale

Of this new rite; nor grasps a love so deep. "Only as o'er Sichæus would she weep."

So there, of oak and firwood, carefully She rears her sister's death-bed to the sky. Then Dido decks the pile with many a wreath; And crowns it with the darker greens of death: Then, mindful of the issue, throws above The sword, the garb, the image of her love. Ranged are the altars, and the priestess there, With locks dishevelled, peals the midnight prayer, Calling on thrice a hundred names of fear, On darkest Erebus, and Chaos drear, And virgin Hecate's nocturnal aid, Three-figured Dian, triple-featured maid; While round about the watery charm she flings, That mocks the spray of deep Avernus' springs. For her dark spells the downy herb is found Cropp'd with brass falchion when the moon is round.

Juice of black poison, and from foal new-born The forehead spot his mother has not torn. There too the Queen, with soft unsandalled tread And hands that reverent wave the holy bread, Along the altars' row ungirdled goes, And calls the gods who can attest her woes,

Calls on the stars that far in ether glide, The calm spectators of her suicide, And that great Justice watching from above The unequal bond of unrequited love.

Twas night, and creatures of the land and deep Drank the sweet slumber that the weary sleep. Now sinks the strife of wood and raging ocean, Stars in high zenith wheel with noiseless motion. No voice is heard upon the silent wold From plumaged birds, or from the slumbering fold:

Whoe'er the tenants of wide gleaming lake,
Or the dark shadows of the bosky brake,
Couched in deep sleep beneath night's canopy,
And lulled to sweet forgetfulness they lie.
But not to Dido comes that happy calm;
Night on her eyelids may not pour the balm;
Back on her heart her boiling passions roll,
And love's returning current floods her soul.

Thus she began and communed with her woe:

"Ah! wretch deluded, whither shall I go?

"Make trial now of those I scorned to wed,

"And sue the honour of a Wanderer's bed?

"Float with this foreign scum upon the wave

"And serve their basest wants, a cabin-slave?

- "Because for sooth I helped them in their need,
- "And Trojan hearts can ne'er forget the deed.
- "If thou couldst dare it, what exulting lord
- "Will take a hated alien on his board?
- "Thou know'st not yet, though ruined and alone,
- "The perjured sons of false Laomedon.
- "With one eloping galley share their joy?
- "Or all my Tyrians for this quest employ,
- "Urging once more upon the wind-swept foam
- "Men torn unwilling from their Sidon home?
- "No. die, as thou deservest!-It will sever-
- "The unflinching steel-thine agony for ever.
- "'Twas thou, my sister, whom my tears could move
- "In that mad moment of my rising love
- "To plunge me headlong in this depth of woe,
- "And hurl me unprotected on the foe.
- "'Twas not for me to lead the wild-wood life,
- "And never know the bondage of a wife,
- "Nor e'en to keep the promise that I gave
- "In the last parting o'er Sychæus' grave."

So burst the plaintive anguish from her heart;
Æneas sleeps, now ready to depart;
On the high galley, to his dreaming ear
That godlike form again speaks warning clear —
'Tis Mercury's self, the voice, the manly grace,
The hair of gold, the fair complexioned face—

- "Child of a goddess, is the danger near
- "In this dread hour so little cause for fear,
- "So sound thy slumbers, madman? Hearken now,
- "How soft upon the sea the west winds blow;
- "While she, the woman, firm resolved to die,
- "As her full tide of passion rages high,
- "Plans a dark scheme of vengeance! Haste away,
- "Haste from the gathering mischief, while you may.
- "Their hurrying barks shall dash the sea to foam,
- "Their ominous torches flare upon the gloom,
- "Fires in a moment lighten all the strand,
- "If morning find thee lingering on the land.
- "Away with all delaying! Woman's will
- "Is changeful as of old, inconstant still."

He spoke, and faded into shadowy night;

But at the sudden darkening of that light,

Æneas, springing from the couch he prest,

Calls on his seamen, chides them from their rest.

"Quick, comrades, to your places at the oar; Shake out all sail! A god comes, as before; He bids us cut the knot of every rope. Divine Unknown, we go in trustful hope; Mayest thou be near us, with the smile of love,
And stars propitious to our courses move."
No more he said: but quick with lightning stroke
His sword unsheathed the hempen cordage broke.
His zeal is kindled in the hurrying crew—
They've launched the ships, and hid the sea from
view;

Bending they churn the foam, and brush the blue.

Now from the saffron chamber of her lord
The first fresh dawn upon the world is poured.
But when the Queen, upon her turret, sees
Sails in the white light standing to the breeze,
The shores untenanted, the emptied docks,
Thrice and again she tears her auburn locks,
Strikes her fair bosom, and begins in wrath:

- "Heavens! Is it weak to stay him on his path,
- "This very throne he has played with? Won't they tear
- "My galleys from their docks; bring crowbar, spear,
- "Bring torches, every brand the City stores;
- "Give every yard its canvas, dash the oars?
- "Ah! where am I? what words are these I say?
- "What maddening frenzy bears my mind away?
- "Unhappy Dido, does thy broken vow,
- "Remorse for deeds unwifely, touch thee now?

- "Better it had been when thy throne was given.-
- "See there, the faithful hand, the child of heaven,
- "Who ever takes his household gods on deck,
- "And 'neath an old sire bent a pious neck!
- "Could I not snatch him from his bark, and throw
- "His body piecemeal to the waves below?
- "Put to the sword his comrades, nay, his son,
- "And serve him for his sire to banquet on?
- "The combat's end were doubtful? Be it so.
- "Fixed now to die, had I to fear the foe?
- "Down on his soldiers I had hurled the fire,
- "And choked with flame the gangways; son and sire
- "Quenched with their breed of Trojans; madly thrown
- "Last on that holocaust of lives mine own.
- "Sun, sweeping all things with thy flaming eye!
- "Thou Juno, judge of all this misery!
- "Thou Hecate, whose dogs at midnight hours
- "Howl at the crossways,—ye Avenging Powers,
- "Ye Spirits hovering o'er Eliza's end,
- "Stoop to the woes that call ye, succour lend,
- "And hear my prayer. If so'tis Heaven's command,
- "If that abhorred man must drift to land,
- "And this decree is fixt; yet flying far
- "Vext with fierce nations and a weary war,

- "Son lost and home, for succour let him call
- "Yet see his own ones in foul murder fall;
- "And ne'er, when yielding at the war's surcease
- "He strikes hard treaties of inglorious peace,
- "Empire or life be his; by unseen hand
- "His fall untimely, and his grave the sand.
- "These my last accents, these the prayers I pour
- "With all my ebbing life-blood; evermore,
- "Ye Tyrians, then let all your enmity
- "Vex the young scions of that cursèd tree:
- "Be these your gifts to Dido's dust below;
- "No love, no treaty, join you to the foe.
- "Rise, thou avenger from my smouldering pyre,
- "To scatter Dardan homes with sword and fire.
- "Now, and hereafter, whensoe'er to arm
- "Time give the summons, and the power to harm:
- "Shores baffling shores, and arms with arms engage;
- "Billows with billows wrestling ever rage,
- "And let their latest sons the lengthening combat wage."

She spoke: and, busy baffling all delay
To end this agony of glaring day,
Brief to her lost lord's nurse she gives command
(Her own was ashes in the fatherland):

- "Hist, hither, Barce dear, my sister bring;
- "First let her bathe in water from the spring;

- "Then fetch those sheep and philtres all; and thou
- "Thyself with holy headband dress thy brow.
- "That rite, all ready for the Lord below,
- "I will enact; and finish with my woe;
- "For flame shall melt that Dardan." But the crone, Fast as her feebleness could speed, was gone.—
 Now see the Oueen; at last she is alone!

What pallor now,—yes, death is very nigh;
How wild the mien, and in the rolling eye
What hue of blood; what sudden-starting streak
Of bloodshot blotches mar the trembling cheek!
She bursts into the courtyard: and at length
Has scaled the ladders: frenzy lent the strength:
And now upon the pyre unsheathes that glaive
Which to the Dardan not for this she gave.
But even then his shawls, the couch which he
Once pressed, detain in tears that poor suttee;—
Upon the pillows flung she utters there
Her death-bed words: "Dear garments, sweet ye
were

- "The little while God granted; now receiving
- "This breath, this anguish ye will be relieving.
- "Far as fate granted I have gone: 'twill go
- "Not unrenowned, this Spirit of mine, below.
- "I built you glorious walls; to husband true,
- "I won from murdering brother vengeance due.

"Ah! days too bright to last; too proud a boast!
"Those Dardan hulks were hurled upon my

Then burying in the pillows all her face;
"To die thus unavenged: yet there is grace
"To die thus, thus! For these hot fires will thrill
"The Dardan on the deep with sight of ill."

Then a brief moment after she had spoke
Her Court behold, betwixt the rolling smoke,
Their fainting Queen with a red bubbling tide
Upon that sword; and either hand flung wide.
Their shriek made all the palace ceilings ring;
Then madly rushing through the town they bring
The news: till men's lament and woman cries,
On roofs all filled with wailing companies,
And one loud beating echoes on the skies:
As if old Tyre or Carthage had been stormed,
And dome and tower by foeman's fire deformed.

Her sister heard; in onward trembling haste, Bruising with clenched fist lips, face, and breast, Breathless she's calling through the crowd by name

On dying Dido: "Was it this that flame,
"That pile of thine prepared me? This the plan
"Thou luredst me to help: too well I can?

- "What's first of all thy wrongings; what the last?
- "Away for this last journey thou hast cast
- "Thy sister; blood has joined us, and again
- "One hour, one sword pang should have joined the twain.
- "With this cursed hand to build it! gods to call!
- "And not there to be near thee after all!
- "Thy light and mine, thy City's, thou hast drowned,
- "Star of its wisdom.-Water for her wound!
- "I'll lave it, and I'll catch, ere it be flown,
- "The sweet breath on her lips, and store it on mine own."

It took no more to mount the pyre, to press
The sufferer to her bosom; with her dress
To staunch the darkling life-blood. Blind with
pain

The Queen looks up; her deep wound creaks again;

Thrice rising on the couch she faints away; Thrice seeks, thrice sickens at the glare of day.

And longer in that combat had she striven:
But Ariel from the pitying Queen of heaven
Comes down to dedicate that golden head,
That so racked soul from knit limbs might be sped.
For not by justice she, nor nature, died;
But sudden swept away on Passion's tide;

105

Death's queen had never tonsured her fair crown, On hell's dark stream to claim her for her own. So, veiled in glittering rain-dew, saffron plumed, Trailing a thousand dyes all sun-illumed, Ariel flits down; and from the sufferer's brow, Saying, "This due to Death I carry now," Cuts clean an auburn tress. All pulses cease; And life glides from her in a sweet release.

TANTÆNE ANIMIS

Jam mea Melpomene Balbum cantabit: amici, Linguis tam sancto rite favete viro, Qui dudum in vacuis animis præfectus Ulubris Consilio placidum pavit ovile suo.

Vescitur iste seri pateris et lacte coacto:

Lac canit exorto, lac pereunte die;

Hausto lacte foras bacchatur, ut undique amellos

Donaque floriferi lutea carpat agri.

Odit inhumanis expulsim ludere bullis;
Et lusus lautæ quos coluere domus:

Damnat item numeros Babylonis: judice eodem
Exitium est abacis alea jacta cavis.

Lumine casta acies, sanctum quæ prodat amorem;
Hostis et assultus hâc galeatus obit.
Æs triplex circa pectus pia lacryma: risus
Sanctior hastilis fungitur ipse vice.

"THE RIVAL CURATES"

From "Fifty Bab Ballads," by the kind permission of Mr. W. S. GILBERT.

List while the poet trolls
Of Mr. Clayton Hooper,
Who had a cure of souls
At Spiffton-extra-Sooper.

He lived on curds and whey, And daily sang their praises, And then he'd go and play With buttercups and daisies.

Wild croquet Hooper banned,
And all the sports of Mammon,
He warred with cribbage, and
He exorcised backgammon.

His helmet was a glance
That spoke of holy gladness;
A saintly smile his lance;
His shield a tear of sadness.

108 Tantæne Animis

Hæc arma indutus venit in certamina; prætor Milite comperiens omnia tuta suo, Gaudia honesta sibi conscit; pagusque cachinnos Audiit insolitos instrepuisse seni:

"Scilicet ædili si forte evaserit omni Mitior expectans, hoc mihi Balbus agit: O ego ter felix, cui mansuetissimus unus Upilio teneros sic tueatur oves."

Balbus item, quamvis, ut sanctam flamen ad aram, Ipse suas laudes non memorare velit, Ipse tamen ruri quemquam mansuetius usquam, Quam se, pastorum munera obire negat.

Mox autem placidas quidam deversus Ulubras Ad Balbi peregre limina casta venit: Isque sacrosanctum temere exhortatus amicum Detulit indignis hæccine facta modis:

"Ergo præstantis tibi mansuetudinis illud, Mî Balbe, æternum rere manere decus; Nec tua visa aliâ præstringi gloria famâ?— En spes exemplo fallitur ista novo.

"The Rival Curates" 109

His vicar smiled to see
This armour on him buckled:
With pardonable glee
He blessed himself and chuckled.

"In mildness to abound
My curate's sole design is;
In all the country round
There's none so mild as mine is!"

And Hooper, disinclined
His trumpet to be blowing,
Yet didn't think you'd find
A milder curate going.

A friend arrived one day
At Spiffton-extra-Sooper,
And in this shameful way
He spoke to Mr. Hooper:

"You think your famous name
For mildness can't be shaken,
That none can blot your fame—
But, Hooper, you're mistaken!

110 Tantæne Animis

Pinguior est tibi mens; sed non tam pinguis, ut aiunt,

Quam Bibulo, atque omni lumine capta, viret:
Officia ille piis procul ædilitia curat,
Diluit et Gabiis lenia pocla suis.

Flatibus aeriis calamos ille implet hiantes;
Tristius os puero est, et sine flore genæ:
Cantantem unanimæ circumgemuere palumbes;
Illius in choreas fistula duxit oves.

Heu melius quam tu proprio puer ille labore, Quod ligno includat, textile nevit opus; Quin albis figitque algas; et nomina ponit, Augurium doctis gratificatus anis."

Dixerat; at juvenem stimulis pertentat amaris;— Sic digitum subitâ cuspide pungit acus: Lictor et æditius veniunt: discrimine tanto Ambo arcessitos consuluisse juvat.

[Ollis sacra inter pietas spectata: sed îdem Ingeniis poterant mox dare frena suis. Dulce ministerium faciunt per sabbata: opellâ Servili senos prostituere dies.]

"The Rival Curates" III

"Your mind is not as blank
As that of Hopley Porter,
Who holds a curate's rank
At Assesmilk-cum-Worter.

"He plays the airy flute,
And looks depressed and blighted,
Doves round about him 'toot,'
And lambkins dance delighted.

"He labours more than you
At worsted work, and frames it;
In old maids' albums, too,
Sticks seaweed—yes, and names it!"

The tempter said his say,
Which pierced him like a needle—
He summoned straight away
His sexton and his beadle.

(These men were men who could Hold liberal opinions! On Sundays they were good— On week-days they were minions.)

112 Tantæne Animis

"Quin cursus rapidos conscendite!—damna vehendi En præsto;—Gabios ocius ite viam: Incauto Bibulo letalem infligite plagam: Di scelus hoc ausis optima quæque dabunt.

Ante tamen,—nam nostra moras clementia suadet, Et ratio subitæ displicet ista necis— Quam pereat, sortem proponite; faminor illi Ouâ liceat vitâ conditione frui.

Condono mortis pœnam, si degere tempus Mutato in paulò lætius ore velit; Expulsim lusisse pilâ, fumisque foveri, Et sese vetitis implicuisse choris.'

Ergo ibant ambo, domini fera jussa secuti.

Arcades: ære rigens emetiuntur iter:

Jamque sacerdoti post fanum putre Gabino,
Miranti Bibulo, nuntia fida dabant:

"Quid? vel ut assuescar saltando, atque edere fumos,

Expulsimque pilâ ludere, Balbus agit:

Me liquidis opus est perfundere odoribus? Hercle,

Valdius huic homini, valdius ista placent.

"To Hopley Porter go,
Your fare I will afford you—
Deal him a deadly blow,
And blessings shall reward you.

"But stay—I do not like
Undue assassination,
And so before you strike,
Make this communication:

"I'll give him this one chance—
If he'll more gaily bear him,
Play croquet, smoke, and dance,
I willingly will spare him."

They went, those minions true,
To Assesmilk-cum-Worter,
And told their errand to
The Reverend Hopley Porter.

"What?" said that reverend gent,
"Dance through my hours of leisure?
Smoke?—bathe myself with scent?—
Play croquet?—Oh, with pleasure!

114 Tantæne Animis

Defuit ah! nimios pridem mihi causa per annos, Cur jura ingenio dem leviora meo: Ecce, diu sperata, mihi venit: omnia Balbi, Credite, ad arbitrium vique coactus agam."

Actum est—jam dextrâ fumos prætendit odoros, Subque supercilio signa nefanda facit:— Ah! quas numinibus læsis spretisque Gabinis Pro culpâ pænas improbus ille dabit.

Et sine rivali Balbus dominatur, et audit
"Macte tuâ reliquos sic pietate dies:"
Et vulgo jam constat agris non crescere cuiquam
Ædili Balbo mitius ingenium.

"For years I've longed for some Excuse for this revulsion:

Now that excuse has come—

I do it on compulsion!!!"

He smoked and winked away—
This Reverend Hopley Porter—
The deuce there was to pay
At Assesmilk-cum-Worter.

And Hooper holds his ground, In mildness daily growing— They think him, all around, The mildest curate going.

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